

## **Ask The Expert for 7.8.07**

### **How do I get my board involved in fundraising and how much should a board member give?**

There isn't a senior nonprofit manager alive that hasn't asked herself this question at some point in her career. Take some comfort in the fact that you are not alone in pondering this question. No one will argue with the notion that the ultimate responsibility for organizational success resides with the board of directors. Further, success not only requires good programs but it also requires the necessary funding to implement those programs and services. Yet this argument alone is rarely enough to motivate board members to spring to action around the fundraising program. True motivation springs from involvement in the life and mission of the organization.

It is a tremendous asset to any organization to have an active board of directors involved in the fundraising function. Most professional fundraisers will tell you that before boards get involved in fund raising, they must first be involved in the mission and governance of the organization. This involvement with the larger scope of the organization often leads to more focused commitment to the fundraising program. It is important to remember that fundraising is a means to an end, and therefore we must involve our board members in the ends if we are to secure willing help on the means.

First and foremost, board members must be engaged in the planning process to determine with staff what the organization wants and what it will do. Involvement in planning builds ownership of the plans which essentially become the organization's agenda for the future and the foundation for all subsequent fundraising. After goals, objectives, programs and services have been determined, planning turns to translating these aspirations into real financial needs, often reflected in budgets. It is essential that the Board participates in determining the financial needs if they are to be involved in serious fundraising in the future.

After this process has been completed, board and staff need to form a partnership to develop and implement a plan to secure the necessary funds required to go forward with the plan. The actual fundraising task is immeasurably strengthened when a true partnership between board and staff is in place. As with other management functions, staff manage the fundraising program, while board members get involved in those elements that are suited to their interests, skills and capabilities. A good fundraising

plan is explicit about both board and staff responsibilities. The following breakout of tasks is an example:

#### BOARD

- Have input into fundraising plan
- Organize and participate on fundraising committee
- Identify and cultivate new pro
- Organize and participate on fundraising committee
- Identify and cultivate new prospects/donors
- Ask peers for donations
- Always be an advocate for the agency
- Make introductions for staff to follow-up
- Accompany staff on key visits to funders
- Help with expressions of thanks when appropriate

#### STAFF

- Accompany staff on key visits to funders
- Help with expressions of thanks when appropriate
- Research new and existing donors
- Write case materials
- Assist board in any way possible
- Write proposals
- Accompany board members on solicitation visits
- Ask for money when appropriate
- Take care of all logistics related to fundraising activities
- Plan, plan, plan

Most people do not gravitate to fundraising naturally or easily. It can be helpful to get board members involved in a process to explore their personal feelings about giving and asking.

A related question to the larger issue of board involvement in fundraising is how much should a board member give? We have another simple answer: the goal should achieve 100% giving by the board and for each member to make a "generous" gift. Obviously, each board member will have to determine what constitutes generosity in terms of their personal financial situation. Another question to ponder: If you can't convince your board members to give, and give generously, what barriers are standing in the way? Answering this question forthrightly will be a critical step in turning a bad situation around.

Fundraising requires commitment from people. The first place to look for the commitment is within the board. After all, the board is the vital link between a nonprofit organization and the public. Board membership in itself

represents a significant level of commitment. The fundraising process demands a deepening of this commitment. Once in place, the organization has a powerful asset for reaching out into the larger community for gift support.

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